

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:

October 6, 1997

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LAST WEEK:

CONTINUING RESOLUTION PASSED - On Tuesday night, the President signed a stopgap spending bill, House Joint Resolution 94, that allows for the continuation of projects and activities covered by the thirteen FY 97 appropriation bills through October 23. The House was the first to pass the short-term continuing appropriations measure on Monday in a 355-57 vote. The Senate followed suit on Tuesday, 99-0. This will provide Congress with three additional weeks to complete nine unfinished appropriation bills, including agriculture.

SENATE MARKUP OF ENDANGERED SPECIES BILL - The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman John Chafee, R-RI) marked up S. 1180, which would overhaul the law that seeks to ensure the survival of threatened and endangered species. The legislation was introduced on September 16th. A number of amendments, including the manager's amendment containing technical revisions asserted by the Administration, were accepted and now allows the Administration to support the bill. Amendments were also accepted that: provide for exemptions from ESA for some emergency situations so that prompt responses can be made; require that recovery plans be reviewed on a five-year cycle; allow states to participate in pre-listing conservation plans; and establish a habitat conservation insurance fund so that if failing plans had to be rewritten, public funds would support that effort. Most of the other 30 amendments were withheld. Some Senators have indicated that they intend to hold their more controversial amendments for the floor. These issues include water rights and compensation to private property owners. Funding is also a major outstanding issue. The bill contains a host of new requirements, including new deadlines for recovery planning, and authorizes appropriations for FWS at twice the current level, which may or may not be supported through the annual appropriations process.

USDA PERFORMANCE - The Acting Chief Financial Officer for USDA, Irwin David, testified Wednesday before the Department Operations, Nutrition and Foreign Agriculture Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-Va.) of the House Agriculture Committee. The focus of the committee was on USDA activities with respect to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). Mr. David explained that each agency developed a plan directed to meet the Secretary's strategic goals. These include: expanding economic and trade opportunities for agriculture producers and other rural residents; expanding food availability for the hungry, ensuring a safe, affordable, nutritious, and accessible food supply; and promoting sensible management of our natural resources. The Department met a major milestone of the GPRA in the delivery of the Strategic Plan on September 30. The next step is to develop complete annual performance plans to accompany FY 1999 budget request.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE-

The following bills of significance to NRCS and conservation were recently introduced:

Bill	Member	Purpose
H.R. 2534	Combest (TX)	Would reauthorize the Research, Extension, and Education programs of USDA.
H.R. 2556	Saxton (NJ)	Would reauthorized the North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989.
S. 1219	Faircloth (NC)	Establishes a research grant program. on the eradication or control of Pfiesteria. (Companion House legislation numbered H.R. 2565)

THIS WEEK:

AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS AWAIT FINAL PASSAGE - The House has scheduled passage of H.R. 2160 under suspension of the rules for Monday, October 6. The Senate will likely pass the measure later in the week.

USDA NOMINATIONS - The Senate Agriculture Committee (Chairman Lugar, R-In.) will hold a confirmation hearing on pending USDA nominations including Sally Thompson to be the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the Department.

Oct. 8 9:00 am 328-A Russell Building

PFIESTERIA IMPACT ON FISHING - The Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans Subcommittee (Chairman Saxton, R-N.J.) of the House Resources Committee will hold a hearing on pfiesteria and its impact on fishery resources. Toxins from this micro-organism has caused a number of fish kills and disease in fish in tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay over the summer.

Oct. 9 10:00 am 1334 Longworth Bldg.

LOOKING AHEAD:

USDA ACCOUNTABILITY/CIVIL RIGHTS - The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Bob Smith R-OR) will hold a hearing on accountability and civil rights at USDA. The hearing will include discussion on H.R. 2185, a bill to establish equitable service for customers and equal opportunity for employees of the Department of Agriculture.

Oct. 23 10:00 am 1300 Longworth Bldg.

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TRAINING AVAILABLE ON LEGISLATIVE ISSUES AND PROCESS -

FOR REGIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAMS - This session will better inform key regional staff and State Conservationists on the status and potential effect of current legislative proposals and activities on natural resource conservation and NRCS. The first regional session was conducted with the Midwest Leadership Team September 25th. The next session is scheduled with the West Region Board of Directors in Phoenix, AZ, Dec. 9th. *Contact Legislative Affairs for details.*

FOR STATE TEAMS - Legislative affairs can provide your state with one to four hour sessions designed to increase employee understanding of the legislative process, review issues currently before the Congress, and identify the importance of developing grass roots support for natural resource issues. Missouri as utilized this training for the past two years. Virginia has the first session scheduled in FY98 for October 6th. *Contact Legislative Affairs for details.*

CAPITOL HILL WORKSHOP - This 2 1/2 day training session is offered by the National Employee Development Center three times in FY98: Feb. 3 - Feb. 5; March 31 - April 2; and June 9 - June 11. It is open to employees GS-13 and above. Participants will examine the role of Congress in the development of national policy. *Contact Tony Lovell at NEDC, (817) 334-5401 Ext. 3214, for details.*

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